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## ART. IX. — THE RECENT STRIKES.

PHILADELPHIA, August 13, 1877.

ALLEN THORNDIKE RICE, ESQ.,

*Editor of the North American Review.*

MY DEAR SIR,—The request that you have done me the honor to make, to give you for publication in the *North American Review* such results of my observation and experience during the recent disastrous disturbances in this country as may appear to have some bearing upon the general interests of the community, finds me absorbed in imperative duties which make it difficult for me to comply with your wishes. But the issues and results of these deplorable events are of such importance to the prosperity and happiness of the American people, without distinction of class, and to the very existence of our social and political institutions, that no one, perhaps, who happens, through whatever circumstances, to have been brought into immediate contact with these events, should allow any personal considerations to restrain him, when the proper occasion is presented, from expressing his candid and deliberate views in regard to them.

I therefore take pleasure in giving you the following statement, which must be taken for what it is worth by the thoughtful readers of the *North American Review*, and my hope is that it may be found of some use in helping the public in this country to form just and practical conclusions on the subject.

On the 16th of July it became known that the firemen and freight brakemen of the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad were on a strike at Martinsburg, West Virginia, and that no freight trains were allowed to pass that point in either direction. This proved to be the beginning of a movement which spread with great rapidity from New York to Kansas, and from Michigan to Texas, which placed an embargo on the entire freight traffic of more than twenty thousand miles of railway, put passenger travel and the movement of the United States mails at the mercy of a mob, subjected great commercial centres like Chicago and St. Louis to the violent dis-

turbance of all their business relations, and made the great manufacturing city of Pittsburgh for twenty-four hours such a scene of riot, arson, and bloodshed as can never be erased from the memory of its people.

In Baltimore, Reading, Scranton, Cleveland, Indianapolis, Fort Wayne, Columbus, Cincinnati, Louisville, and many points in New York and New Jersey, the laws were set at defiance, the property of the various railway companies seized, injured, or destroyed, the civil authorities overpowered or overawed, and in many cases compelled to call upon the military power of the States to protect persons and property. This call could not in all cases be fully met. The governors of West Virginia, Maryland, and Pennsylvania, acted with great promptness, but found the military organizations of their States, although very efficient for the suppression of any ordinary outbreak, unable to suppress what rapidly grew from a riot to an insurrection; and were compelled to invoke the aid of the United States government. To this the President at once responded to the extent of the forces at his command; and the presence of detachments of the regular army and navy hastily gathered from all quarters, and hurried to the points most seriously threatened, aided largely in securing the comparative quiet which now prevails within the borders of those States. Had it not been, however, that in many communities the municipal authorities acted with great nerve and efficiency, and were supported by organizations of citizens, and by a public sentiment determined to maintain law and order at any cost, the troubles to be encountered would no doubt have been much more serious.

I do not wish, and happily it is not necessary, to fill your pages with the mere recital of the distressing cases of violence and outrage which marked the course of these riots unexampled in American history. Suffice it to say that the conduct of the rioters is entirely inconsistent with the idea that this movement could have been directed by serious, right-minded men bent on improving the condition of the laboring classes. How wages could be improved by destroying property, the existence of which alone made the payment of any wages at all possible, it is difficult to understand. Nothing but the insanity of passion, played upon by designing and mischievous leaders, can explain the destruction of vast quantities of railroad equipment absolutely necessary to the

transaction of its business, by men whose complaint was that the business done by the full equipment in possession of the railways did not pay them sufficient compensation for their labor.

During the greater part of our century of national existence we have enjoyed such unbroken prosperity that we had perhaps come to expect exemption from many of the worst problems which perplex other and older civilizations. The vast area of public land open to cultivation and settlement had steadily drained off not only our own surplus population, but that of other countries, and the rapid extension of our railway system, by furnishing markets for the productions of all parts of the country, had increased the national wealth and built up a general prosperity. But for the Civil War this state of things might have continued to exist; but the waste of human life and the destruction of property which accompanied that war, the loss of real productive power, and the creation of large debts, national, State, and municipal, involving heavy taxation to meet them, have entailed burdens upon us which were lightly felt during the feverish excitement of the civil conflict, but the weight of which became suddenly onerous and almost intolerable when the financial condition of the country was so seriously disturbed by the panic of 1873. In a few hours the credit upon which the fabric of our apparent prosperity rested was almost entirely destroyed, the capital which had been freely lent to all enterprises offering even a show of prospective profit was suddenly withdrawn. Since that time the country has been obliged to meet its debts, not by renewals, but by actual payments from its resources. Every important industry in the country has been compelled to practise the closest and most rigid economies, in order to escape marketing its products at an absolute loss. The cotton and woollen mills of New England, the furnaces and mines of Pennsylvania, Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, and Missouri, have all passed through the same experience, and have the same story to tell. The capital which communist orators so eloquently denounce has yielded such scant returns as the men who pretend to dictate the scale of adequate wages for labor would regard with disdain. In every manufacturing State in the country it is perfectly well known that many establishments have been kept in operation simply that the men might be employed. This has been done often without one iota

of profit to the owners. During the last winter the large rolling-mills in Pennsylvania must have been closed, and thousands of laboring men reduced to idleness, and possibly want, had not the railroads — which, during the recent madness that swept over the country, were selected for mob violence and opprobrium — come to their relief by anticipating their wants, and by giving orders for rails months in advance of their actual requirements. Political economists may object that it was not an act of charity in which great corporations had any right to indulge, but it is certain that without this thousands of laboring men in the State of Pennsylvania alone would have suffered severely.

Not only this, but in order to aid the industries which are now so much depressed, and to enable manufacturers to continue business and thus keep their men steadily employed, the railways of the country have reduced their local freight charges to the lowest point ever known, and have moved the heavy materials used in making iron, steel, glass, and other products at rates barely above the actual cost of transportation; and yet, by a curiously inverted process of reasoning, the course thus pursued by the railways has been most bitterly denounced by the self-constituted mouthpieces of the very classes which have alone profited by it.

It is safe to assert that so far as the special class of railway employés, firemen and freight brakemen is concerned, there are, perhaps, but few railway companies in the United States which are not to-day employing a force of train-hands larger than their actual business requires. With the falling off of revenue from traffic, the question was presented at once to railway managers, whether the force employed on the lines should be reduced to that actually necessary for the work to be done, in which case greater compensation might have been paid to the men so retained while others equally deserving must have been turned adrift,—or whether it would not be both wiser and kinder to retain as many men as possible in the service, by so allotting the work as to permit all to earn a sum, smaller indeed than in the past, yet it was hoped sufficient to support themselves and their families during the severe period of depression, to the near close of which railway managers, in common with all the business men of the country, perhaps too confidently looked forward. This course, as I have said, may be condemned by the hard rules of political economy. The experi-

ence of the past few weeks seems to show that it has commended itself as little to those whom it was intended to relieve, and to whom alone, if anybody, it has been beneficial.

It must not for a moment, however, be understood that the greatest portion, or, indeed, any considerable portion, of the outrages upon life and property which have disgraced our recent history were actually committed by railway employés. It is not true that the majority, or even any large portion, of these men have been disloyal to the trust reposed in them. Probably ninety per cent of the men on all the important lines of the country where strikes occurred were faithful to their duties, and either remained at work, or stood ready to resume it as soon as they were relieved from the actual intimidation to which they were subjected by the rioters and their leaders. It was the dissatisfied element — which exists in that branch of industry as in all others — which perpetrated or allowed the perpetration of most of the overt acts of violence, such as stopping trains, forcing men therefrom, uncoupling cars, disconnecting engines, and other lawless doings of the kind, and which made itself amenable also to the charge of directly attacking the interests of the government and society at large as well as of the railway companies.

As General Hurlbut of Illinois so forcibly expresses it, in a paper recently published, "they permitted themselves to be the nucleus around which the idle, vicious, and criminal element could gather. Reinforced by these dark and disreputable allies, they destroyed property, stopped commerce, deranged the mails, burned great public buildings, broke up tracks, and thus paralyzed the natural circulation of the Commonwealth." It is in the menace to the general interests of society involved in these disturbances that the real gravity of the situation with which this country is now called to deal exists. "The railroad system is to-day a supreme necessity to maintain life, furnish ready markets, and to bring about the enormous interchange of products which makes the country one. Stop it, and in ten days many parts of the country would near the starvation-point, and within a month there would be no hamlet in the vast territory drained by these channels but would feel to the core of its business the effects of the stoppage of this regular and usual circulation."

The enormous mechanical changes and progress of the past

century have brought about a complete revolution, so gradual that perhaps it has not been generally apprehended, in the very condition of things in the United States. The water lines, which, at the date of the framing of the Constitution, were our important channels of internal commerce, have been almost superseded by the new iron highways. Upon these is borne a traffic so essentially national, so closely interwoven with the interests not only of our own but other countries, that it demands the most efficient and speedy protection against all unlawful interference. Grain and other agricultural products of Iowa, Minnesota, and Illinois, the wool, wine, and bullion of California, Nevada, and Utah, the cotton and other products of Texas, Louisiana, Mississippi, and Tennessee are largely carried over the railways to New York, Boston Philadelphia, Baltimore, and other Atlantic cities, much of it for, transshipment to Europe, while in return the manufactures of New England and the Middle States, with our importations from the various countries of the world, the basis of our national customs revenue, reach by the same railways all parts of the great West and the South. Certainly this great inland commerce, both in tonnage and value, is of such vast proportions, and requires for its successful management such absolute and uninterrupted freedom of movement, that the public to which the traffic belongs is entitled to instant and effective protection against all violent interruption, in the first place from the proper local authorities and the State itself, and in addition thereto, when their force is found inadequate, as it has been found in so many cases during the recent troubles, from the government of the United States.

It is well known that the government uses the railway lines of the country, both as postal and military highways, in such form as its interests may require. The Constitution of the United States imposes upon the government the duty of thoroughly protecting inter-State commerce. When it is considered that the stock and bond holders of the various railway companies, whenever the interests of the government required it, paid taxes upon their coupons, their dividends, and their gross receipts, that they promptly met every call made by the Federal authorities, and that the entire equipment of the various lines was often placed at the disposal of the government for the prompt movement of the national forces and their supplies, to the exclusion often of other and more profit-

able traffic, it would seem but a matter of equity that the government should insure such protection to these railways as would preserve their usefulness and keep them always in condition to render similar services when they may be required. But over and beyond such considerations as these, the absolute dependence of the whole community upon this great system of railways for almost its very existence as a civilized body would seem to impose upon the Federal government in the last resort the supreme duty of preventing any lawless and violent interference with the regular and certain operation of every railway in the United States.

This insurrection, which extended through fourteen States, and in many cases successfully defied the local authorities, presents a state of facts almost as serious as that which prevailed at the outbreak of the Civil War. Unless our own experience is to differ entirely from other countries,—and it is not easy to see why it should, with the increasing population of our large cities and business centres, and the inevitable assemblage at such points of the vicious and evil-disposed,—the late troubles may be but the prelude to other manifestations of mob violence, with this added peril, that now, for the first time in American history, has an organized mob learned its power to terrorize the law-abiding citizens of great communities. With our recent experience before us, it is believed that no thoughtful man can argue in favor of delay by the proper authorities in dealing with lawless and riotous assemblages. Delay simply leads to destruction of property, and may lead in the end to the destruction of life. The force used to repress such assemblages should be as prompt in its manifestation as the evil with which it deals. The interests concerned are too grave to admit of delay. The raising of the black flag and the stoppage of all vessels on the Great Lakes and on the Mississippi and Ohio rivers would not produce one tithe of the damage to the whole country that has resulted from the recent stoppage of the great trunk-lines. The burning of the vessels and their cargoes on these waters would raise a storm of wrath which no mob would dare to face, and would be visited by the United States government, under existing laws, with most exemplary punishment. But what distinction can be established between such a crime and the hideous destruction at Pittsburgh of over eighteen hundred cars laden with the products of the various States, to-



gether with the engines ready to move them to their destination, and the station buildings and machine-shops that were absolutely essential to their proper care and movement, and which with other like doings resulted in the stoppage of all commerce and business relations between the States, not only on one highway, but on many important lines, through the concerted action of the mob and its leaders? In the city of Pittsburgh much human life and many private dwellings and other property were sacrificed as the result of mob violence; indeed, it is almost a marvel that a large portion of that city was not destroyed by fire. Only the prevailing direction of the wind averted greater and more general disaster.

The authority of the United States, now potent to protect commerce moving upon the waters, should be equally potent when the same commerce is exposed to greater peril upon land. This brings us, then, to the practical question: In what shape can this protection be put so as to be extended most efficiently and with the least delay? The present regulations all favor, unintentionally, the rioters and the mob. In the first place the mayor of a city must exhaust his power, the sheriff of the county must essay his strength; then, while precious time is expending,—for a mob constantly attracts dangerous elements and grows with impunity and success,—the governor of the State must be called upon by the sheriff of a county. If the State happens to have an effective military organization, which at the present time is the case in perhaps not more than five out of the thirty-seven States of the Union, the governor can call out the military forces and suppress the riot. If the State has no such organization, or if the military forces of the State prove inadequate to the emergency, the governor is paralyzed and must call upon the United States for assistance. If the authorities of any State should, for any cause, fail or refuse to call upon the United States government, what possible remedy or protection is left to life and property within the limits of that Commonwealth?

It can readily be seen what frightful possibilities of mischief are afforded by the necessarily long interval which must elapse in the present state of our laws before the Federal authority can intervene in cases where its intervention is most imperative. In fact, as our recent experience has shown, the only roads which could procure prompt protection and immunity from interference

were those whose misfortunes had made them bankrupt and placed them in the direct custody of receivers appointed by United States courts. To the aid of these roads the United States Marshal could call United States troops, and no rioter dared to resist the power represented by the small but admirably disciplined detachments quartered near the scenes of the recent troubles. It will hardly be contended that the railway companies must become bankrupt in order to make secure the uninterrupted movement of traffic over their lines, or to entitle them to the efficient protection of the United States government. If a bondholder or other creditor is entitled to the protection of the Federal courts to prevent the threatened impairment of the value of a property through legal proceedings, he certainly should not be left without remedy against lawless violence which has actually destroyed the security for his investment, and has, as at Pittsburgh, converted millions of dollars into scrap-iron and ashes. The laws which give the Federal courts the summary process of injunction to restrain so comparatively trifling a wrong as an infringement of a patent-right certainly must have been intended or ought to give the United States authority to prevent a wrong-doing which not only destroys a particular road, but also paralyzes the entire commerce of the country and wastes the national wealth.

It is demonstrable that during the recent disturbances the government of the United States was itself a direct loser, and, through the government, the taxpayers of the whole country, to a very large amount by the diminution of the national revenues arising from the interruption of business and the interference with many of the operations on which the internal taxes of the country are levied, as well as by the diminution of the customs revenues; as all the imports during this period, instead of being forwarded to their destinations, were necessarily placed in store, of course without payment of any duty to the government for the time being. Suppose that this state of things had continued for sixty days, would not the United States government have been deprived of nearly all the revenues on which it relies to meet its current obligations?

Certainly it cannot have been contemplated in the formation of our government that the United States authorities should submit to see the transportation of the mails, covering the enormous financial

and business transactions of the whole country, and the movement of the supplies required for its own various departments, made dependent upon the grace and favor of rioters, whose misconduct in almost any other form would have secured their immediate arrest and condign punishment. During the recent riots the movement of United States troops was impeded at several points, and large quantities of ammunition and other Federal stores, on their way to the Pacific coast, were forcibly detained for days. The operations of the national government in some parts of the country were as completely blocked as in the early days of the Civil War. There certainly should be a protection against such dangers and a remedy for such wrongs. If the government of the United States is to exercise its power of protection or of remedy, it perhaps can do so only through an adequate exhibition of the military force that may be given it for such purposes by Congress. The important question is to ascertain in what way the government can so exhibit its military force as to secure the utmost possible efficiency in the enforcement of law and order without jarring or disturbing the general framework of our institutions and our laws. It seems to be indispensable, in the light of recent events, that whatever force is to be used by the government in such emergencies should be so distributed and controlled that it may be concentrated upon any point or points that may be threatened within a few hours of any outbreak. Several companies of regular troops that were quartered at Baltimore, Philadelphia, Pittsburgh, Reading, Scranton, Louisville, Chicago, and other places, during the recent riots, had to be transported for such distances that, if they had been compelled to march instead of moving by rail, they would have been powerless to avert mischief. It was only by the fear or favor of the rioters that the United States were able to concentrate their forces where they did. In some cases formal resolutions were passed by the strikers that no troops should be allowed to pass over the lines. In Jersey City a mob endeavored to prevent the departure of a United States battery and the troops connected therewith. On the Erie Railway, between Cornell and Hornellsville, a few lawless men, by tearing up tracks, destroying bridges, and tampering with switches, were able seriously to retard the military forces of the State, which were there under the orders of the governor to re-establish law and order. What is needed, therefore, would clearly

seem to be that proper forces should be so disposed at prominent points, large cities and other great business centres, — in many of which the government has arsenals, custom-houses, mints, navy-yards, and other property of its own to protect, — that their movements can be combined rapidly, and they be directed against points of danger so as to be able to act effectively and with decision before violence can become triumphant.

With the experience of other countries to warn and guide us, and especially with the experience of England, where the rights of the people have for ages been guarded and asserted as jealously as they always have been and should be among ourselves, we shall have only ourselves to blame, if through apathy, demagoguism, or weakness we leave ourselves unprepared to meet an issue which from all the evidences of the times is only too likely again to be forced upon us. With the approach of winter, and the loss of outdoor employment which severe weather even in the most prosperous times entails, the country will have to deal not only with the deserving among the unemployed, who can be reached and helped through local organizations, but with vast numbers of idle, dangerous, and in many cases desperate men, who have been allowed unfortunately to catch a glimpse of their possible power for mischief. Such men, unless confronted by a thorough organization in the cities, States, and other communities, backed by the power of the Federal government and an unmistakable public opinion, will need but little urging to renew the scenes which have already brought such disgrace upon the American name.

It surely may be hoped that at the approaching session of Congress, the earnest, unprejudiced, and patriotic men of both Houses will discuss this grave subject independently of party lines, and with the united resolve to secure equity to all interests and to take all necessary measures to secure protection to life and property and the impartial enforcement of the laws, including the guaranty to every man of the right to work for such compensation as he may agree upon with other men, free from interference or intimidation. The able lawyers of the Senate and House will perhaps frame a law which will give to the owners of every highway carrying inter-State commerce, whether by land or water, in which citizens of different States are interested, or carrying the United States mails or other government property, the right to appear by

petition properly verified before the tribunals of the United States in order to show that the movement of such traffic has been interfered with by unlawful combinations, by threats, or by violence, and which upon such showing will give these tribunals the right, when necessary, to call upon the United States in the form now authorized by law to enforce their process by arresting the rioters and the suppression of all such unlawful combinations.

The magnitude of the evil to be met and dealt with can hardly be overstated. The remedy to be provided should be equally prompt and effective. It must be discussed and adopted in the interest of the whole country, and not of any particular class ; for the interests of all classes of our citizens are the same in the maintenance of domestic peace and civil order.

But to no one class in the community is an absolute assurance of peace so important as to the men who have no capital but their labor. When the accumulations of labor are put in peril by lawlessness, capital may always protect itself by suspending the enterprises which give labor its value and insure it its reward. Anarchy not only deprives the laboring man of his present subsistence, but puts in jeopardy all his hopes of improvement for his own future and the future of his family.

My own railway experience, extending over a period of thirty years, leads me to believe that the managers of American railways in general may fearlessly appeal to their past relations with the faithful among their employés, to prove that they at least have always endeavored to treat the interests of employers and employed as identical, and have never failed to take into prompt and respectful consideration every grievance which has been fairly and properly presented to them. I am sure that it has been the purpose of the company with which I am connected to at all times pay its employés the best compensation that the business of the country would warrant ; and I have no doubt that this will be the policy of the company for all future time, as it is founded on sound business principles no less than upon the instincts of humanity.

Very truly yours,

THOMAS A. SCOTT.